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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000101

SIPDIS

STATE FOR T AND NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [ASEC](#) [KISL](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [KICC](#) [IAEA](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR UNDER SECRETARY BOLTON'S JANUARY 30 VISIT TO BAHRAIN

REF: A. 04 USUN 2176

[1](#)B. 04 STATE 268185

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) We warmly welcome your visit to Bahrain. On the key issues of Iran, counter-terrorism, and Article 98, you will find the Bahraini government to be fully supportive of U.S. foreign policy objectives and interests. However, on CT and Article 98, you will find that there are specific areas that the GOB has yet to adequately address. Your visit can help push Bahrain's leadership to understand that taking action in these areas is in both our countries' interest and will stabilize the bilateral relationship in critical security-related areas.

[1](#)2. (S) We have requested meetings with Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Minister of Defense LTG Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs/Minister of Information Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar. You met with Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed on the margins of the UNGA in September 2004 (Ref A) and with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Abdul Ghaffar in November 2004 (Ref B).

The Iranian Threat

[1](#)3. (S) Bahrain has historically worried about the Iranian threat to Bahrain and the region, and supports a strong policy of containing Iran. Given that Bahrain's population is 70 percent Shia, the GOB is deeply aware of possible Iranian interference in Bahrain's domestic affairs. Bahrain understands that the presence of the U.S. Navy in country is the best means to deter Iranian expansionism. In meetings with visiting U.S. officials, Bahrain's senior leadership has offered encouragement and support for U.S. efforts to contain the Iranian nuclear program. They have voiced concern that Bahrain is within range of Iranian ballistic missiles.

[1](#)4. (S) The GOB is deeply suspicious of the Iranian role in Iraq. Senior officials have spoken about the entry of "a million" Iranians into Iraq to vote in the January 30 elections. They fear the regional instability that would be caused by a Shia government in Iraq that is allied with Iran and its potential impact on Shia-majority Bahrain.

Counter Terrorism

[1](#)5. (S) Since July 2004, when the (then) six Sunni extremist terrorism suspects were re-arrested, Bahraini officials from Prime Minister Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman down have told us that the GOB would conduct a thorough investigation and aggressive prosecution of the case. Most recently, in a January 3 meeting with the King, the Ambassador said that the United States wants the GOB to pursue the prosecution of the remaining four suspects energetically.

[1](#)6. (S) The court case against the four is inactive for the time being while the constitutional court addresses a motion by the defense team contesting the constitutionality of the charges against the four for conspiracy to commit terrorist attacks. The constitutional case could take months, and the suspects will remain outside of detention for the period of the trial, per the order of the judge. Bahraini security forces are keeping the suspects under heavy surveillance. We are concerned that anything other than a vigorous prosecution of the suspects will send a signal that Bahrain is not fully committed to fighting threats to public order, particularly from domestic Sunni extremists. You will want to emphasize this point.

[1](#)7. (S) On a related CT issue, Bahrain is sending a special forces company embedded in the UAE military contingent in Afghanistan. The Bahrain Defense Force has taken practical steps with both us and the Emiratis to prepare for a projected deployment date of April 2005.

Hung Up on Article 98

18. (S) Despite having signed an Article 98 agreement with us in February 2003, the GOB has not yet taken steps to bring it into force. Our primary interlocutor on Article 98, Minister of State Abdul Ghaffar, has told us repeatedly that Bahrain would never deliver an American citizen, whether civilian or military, to a third country. He contends that ratification of the agreement would have to go through the Council of Representatives (COR), and he could not guarantee the COR would pass the agreement. The Ambassador has suggested that Bahrain bring the agreement into force by way of an exchange of diplomatic notes. The Ambassador delivered draft text of a proposed exchange of notes (provided by the Department) to Abdul Ghaffar on January 4. Abdul Ghaffar said he would look carefully at the materials and get back to us.

ZIADEH